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ABSTRACT

A survey of 767 teachers from five major regions of the country solicited teachers' views and perceptions concerning the roles and responsibilities of reading consultants. It was found that 85% or more of the respondents thought that the prime functions of reading consultants are to diagnose students' reading problems, interpret test results, provide for poor readers, be available to teachers for conferences and direct assistance, assist in making provision for advanced readers, make suggestions for improvement of teachers' procedures, and assist teachers in individualizing instruction. Other important functions as agreed to by 50% or more of the respondents were assisting teachers with testing, helping pupils develop favorable attitudes toward reading, making demonstration lessons, providing on the job help with teaching reading skills, assisting in developing reading centers, and being available to teachers for parent conferences. Other responses receiving 50% or more agreement related to inservice training and facilitative assistance provided by the consultant to the classroom teacher. (TJ)

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOW READING CONSULTANTS CAN BE OF BEST USE

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WHAT'S UP

Every school system has coordinators, supervisors, consultants or certain administrators who perform roles assumed to be helpful to classroom reading teachers. The roles vary because the functions are not delineated clearly. Whereas a reading coordinator in one school system is called a consultant, possibly a supervisor in another, their functions, at times similar, are more often than not dependent on the individual's self-held view of a consultant.[1] Seemingly, administrative-supervisory personnel can provide service to reading teachers; but all too often from my viewpoint, they appear to be undiscerning about which services are greatly or overwhelmingly appreciated and those which are seen as having lower priority by reading teacher. It is this thought which led to an investigation to ascertain reading teachers' perceptions of the reading consultant's functions assembled from opinionnaires.[2]

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[1]The term consultant rather than supervisor is preferred by the writer, a conscience choice, because of the connotation the term conveys. The term coordinator is being shunned, too, because in my mind it is a weak word carrying little meaning or dignity.

WHY BRING IT UP?

Rockwell (1976) along with Robinson and Rauch (1976) speak to the issue of the reading consultant's functions: a resource person, an inservice leader, a research investigator, a diagnostician, an instructor, an evaluator. The consultant's tasks are mentioned as visiting and establishing a good rapport with classroom teachers, planning and demonstrating reading techniques, testing and interpreting test scores, providing materials and information, introducing current periodicals, retesting children, consulting with parents and teachers, and solving problems (Knight, 1930; Sister Josephine, 1965; and Kossack, 1976; Burg, Kaufman, Korngold and Kovner, 1978). But even with these functions and tasks acknowledged by authorities cited, Carline (1972) pointedly states the notion, probably not challenged by many, that, "Although the reading coordinator (consultant) is generally acknowledged to be a necessary element in the school system...the practical application of responsibilities still seems to be an unresolved issue." If a reading coordinator is to be successful, the role must be clarified, understood, and agreed upon. Therefore, there is a pointed need to further define consultant functions.

The role of the reading consultant has undergone many changes from the duties that the consultant performed when the position originated. At first the consultant helped students who were below their reading expectancy levels and was considered another special area teacher. Today the reading consultant's duties are more numerous than ever before as she is relied upon by teachers to

assist in many different ways. Once dealing mainly with students, the consultant now has personal contact mostly with teachers and administrators; and through these relationships, the consultant is able to reach more students than if she deals with them directly.

What research has been done has demonstrated the need for a conscientious and unified effort to clarify the shifting and expanding dimensions of the reading consultant's functions vis-a-vis reading teachers' perceptions and expectations. However, role-definition, while encompassing colleague expectations, should also reflect the expansion and restructuring of the consultant's professional activities resulting from demands within the educational area, so as to make optimum and efficient use of the reading consultant's unique expertise. We assumed the challenge.

WHO PARTICIPATED?

Teachers enrolled in graduate reading classes were surveyed and asked opinions concerning the roles and functions of reading consultants and/or supervisors. Seven hundred sixty-seven teachers responded to an opinionnaire sent out to five major regions of the country in 1977-78. (Distribution of opinionnaires was made through the courtesy of professional colleagues in the Organization of Teacher Educators in Reading, a special interest group in the International Reading Association.)

Demographic items selected for inclusion were the following: (1) number of years teaching reading, (2) grade level of teaching experience, (3) survey participant's sex, (4) whether teaching

experience had been in urban, rural or suburban communities, and (5) number of schools for which the reading consultant or supervisor was responsible.

From data obtained in a frequency analysis of the responses to our opinionnaire a profile of our sample population emerged. Almost 68% were novice teachers with five or less years teaching experience. Experienced professionals, those with between six and fifteen years experience, comprised twenty four percent; while the veteran professionals, participants having more than fifteen years teaching experience represented 8%.

Concerning query two, on what level teaching experience occurred, 71% had an elementary background, 16.5% taught in the middle or junior high, and the remaining 10.5% had senior high school teaching experience.

Our survey population was comprised mostly of women, with only 14% of the participants being male. However, the data revealed a surprisingly even distribution regarding locale of teaching experience (urban, suburban, or rural), with adjusted frequency percentages and corresponding absolute frequencies of the three categories as follows:

urban	31.4%	227
suburban	36 %	260
rural	32.5%	235

The last question on part one of the opinionnaire asked the number of schools for which their reading consultant was responsible. 18% indicated that the reading specialist functioned as a consultant to all the schools in the community, compared to 20% of the participating teachers who stated that the consultant was responsible for one school.

44%, however, responded that there was no specialist for their school, while the remaining 18% indicated that their reading consultant had to serve multiple schools.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the opinionnaire was to solicit the degree of teachers' views and perceptions concerning the reading consultant's roles and responsibilities. Given a five part semantic differential rating scale, teachers were asked to rate individually twenty-eight activities according to how strongly they felt the reading consultant would be aiding them in their teaching by providing expert assistance. For purpose of analysis the twenty-eight separate activities were grouped into three general categories; 1) functions of the specialist concerned with direct classroom instructional assistance, 2) activities of an in-service training nature, and 3) the consultant in the role of administrator. Survey item designation to each category was arbitrarily assigned by the investigators. Within each of the general areas, items were rank-ordered according to the cumulative percents of the teacher responses, strongly agree (s.a.) and agree (a.) After careful scrutiny three distinct clusters of teacher expectation regarding functions and activities of the reading specialist surfaced: prime functions, secondary functions, and minor teacher considerations. Specific item assignment to clusters were conducted according to arbitrary criteria established by the investigators based on percent score cut-offs. We designated to prime functions items with cumulative frequencies $\geq$ 85%. Secondary

functions were those statements with cumulative frequencies ≤ 84% and ≥ 50%. Survey items in each general area which fell below 50% were clustered as minor teacher considerations of the reading consultant's facilitory duties.

Tables I, II, and III show specific cluster breakdown of opinionnaire statements used to assess the sample's expectations of the consultant's roles and duties in each of the three major areas. In addition, the cumulative frequency percents are given for every item. Directly following the computed cumulative percents, in parentheses, are the specific relative percents of strongly agree (s.a.) and agree (a.).

FINDINGS

Under the category of Direct Instructional Assistance, seven items (See Table I) met the criteria (cf ≥ 85%) for classification as prime functions. DIAGNOSING STUDENTS' READING PROBLEMS, INTERPRETATION OF TEST RESULTS, AND PROVIDING FOR POOR READERS headed the list with over 90% agreeing these are tasks at which the consultant could be most helpful. BEING AVAILABLE TO TEACHERS FOR CONFERENCES AND DIRECT ASSISTANCE, ASSISTING IN MAKING PROVISION FOR ADVANCED READERS, MAKING SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHERS' PROCEDURES and ASSISTING TEACHERS INDIVIDUALIZE INSTRUCTION were supported as important consultant functions by 85 to 90% of the teachers.

Secondary functions (cf ≤ 84% ≥ 50%) included six items (See Table II) being agreed to by about three fourths of the 767 respondents. In descending order these included ASSISTING TEACHERS WITH TESTING, HELPING PUPILS DEVELOP FAVORABLE ATTITUDES TOWARD READING, MAKING

DEMONSTRATION LESSONS, PROVIDING ON THE JOB HELP WITH TEACHING READING SKILLS AND ASSIST IN DEVELOPING READING CENTERS, AND BEING AVAILABLE TO TEACHERS FOR PARENT CONFERENCES. Even though these were classified secondary for the purpose of priorizing, nevertheless, these are important consultant functions which should be included in a consultant's role description.

TABLE I
DIRECT INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANCE

PRIME FUNCTIONS
cf ≥ 85%

8. PROVIDE ASSISTANCE IN DIAGNOSING STUDENTS' READING PROBLEMS.
93.8% (s.a.=59.1%, a.=34.7%)

9. HELP TEACHERS WITH INTERPRETATION OF TEST RESULTS.
92.5% (s.a.=51.5%, a.=41%)

23. ASSIST TEACHERS IN PROVIDING FOR POOR READERS.
90.5% (s.a.=48.8%, a.=41.7%)

29. BE AVAILABLE TO TEACHERS FOR CONFERENCES AND DIRECT ASSISTANCE.
88% (s.a.=43.3%, a.=44.6%)

24. ASSIST TEACHERS IN PROVIDING FOR ADVANCED READERS.
87% (s.a.=40.9%, a.=46.1%)

21. MAKE SUGGESTIONS TO HELP READING TEACHERS IMPROVE THEIR PROCEDURES.
86.5% (s.a.=34.7%, a.=51.8%)

12. ASSIST TEACHERS INDIVIDUALIZE READING INSTRUCTION, TO MEET PUPILS' SPECIFIC READING NEEDS.
85.5% (s.a.=44.5%, a.=41%)

SECONDARY FUNCTIONS
CF ≤ 84% ≥ 50%

7. ASSIST TEACHERS IN ADMINISTERING STANDARDIZED AND INFORMAL DIAGNOSTIC INSTRUMENTS.
77.6% (s.a.=34.7%, a.=42.9%)

22. ASSIST TEACHERS IN HELPING PUPILS DEVELOP FAVORABLE ATTITUDES TOWARD READING 76.5% (s.a.=31.5%, a.=45%)

20. BE AVAILABLE FOR TEACHING DEMONSTRATION LESSONS.
75.3% (s.a.=31.7%, a.=43.7%)

18. PROVIDE ON-THE-JOB HELP WITH TEACHING OF READING SKILLS.
74.9% (s.a.=33.5%, a.=41.4%)

19. ASSIST TEACHERS IN DEVELOPING CLASSROOM READING CENTERS.
72.8% (s.a.=24.4%, a.=48.5%)

27. BE AVAILABLE TO TEACHERS FOR PARENT CONFERENCES.
70.9% (s.a.=31.1%, a.=39.7%)

MINOR TEACHER CONSIDERATIONS
cf<50%

30. TAKE OVER CLASSES PERMITTING TEACHERS TO OBSERVE OTHER READING TEACHERS.
48% (s.a.=19.1%, a.=28.9%)

The remaining statement classified as direct instructional aid, which was labeled minor teacher considerations of the reading consultant's responsibilities relative to direct instructional aid, was found to be an important, facilitory consultant service by only 48% of our respondents. This was considerably less than the lowest ranked statement in the secondary function cluster (cf = 70%). The assistance given by the consultant would have been to TAKE OVER CLASSES PERMITTING TEACHER'S RELEASE TIME TO OBSERVE OTHER READING TEACHERS.

Inservice training assistance, our second general area, consisted of seven statements to which teachers participating in our survey assessed the degree they felt consultant assistance would be beneficial. The opinionnaire items arbitrarily assigned are included in Table II according to cluster breakdown of items pertaining to inservice training duties of the reading consultant.

Two of the seven opinionnaire statements appointed to the second general area, inservice training duties of a consultant, elicited teacher responses of strongly agree and agree $\geq$ 85%.

From the high percent of agree responses, reading teachers want consultants to provide inservice training which will KEEP THE TEACHERS ABREAST OF THE LATEST ASSESSMENT DEVICES. Also, of high priority is HELP WITH ADAPTING MATERIALS AND PROCEDURES TO PRESCRIPTIVE TEACHING. To us, it is little wonder that these topics would head this list of prime functions. The development of criterion-referenced tests, sometimes as integral parts of management systems, is a relatively new phenomenon that classroom reading teachers are asked

to employ. Coupled to these tests is prescriptive teaching; so it is again of little surprise that assistance with prescriptive materials and teaching procedures should be rated correspondingly high. It is clear from our survey that most teachers, approximately 90%, would like to have inservice help relating to these topics.

TABLE II
INSERVICE TRAINING ASSISTANCE
PRIME FUNCTIONS
CF $\geq$ 85%

10. KEEP TEACHERS ABREAST OF LATEST ASSESSMENT DEVICES SUCH AS CRITERION-REFERENCE TESTS.
91.7% (s.a.=53.4%, a.=38.3%)

11. HELP TEACHERS ADAPT THEIR MATERIALS AND PROCEDURES TO PRESCRIPTIVE TEACHING.
87.6% (s.a.=46.1%, a.=41.6%)

SECONDARY FUNCTIONS
CF $\leq$ 84% $\geq$ 50%

14. CONDUCT INSERVICE WORKSHOPS.
83.7% (s.a.=46.4%, a.=37.3%)

13. HELP TEACHERS COORDINATE MANAGEMENT OF A READING SKILLS SYSTEM SO THAT EACH TEACHER WILL KNOW THE PRECISE SKILL NEEDS OF EACH STUDENT.
81.9% (s.a.=38.7%, a.=43.2%)

25. HELP TEACHERS DETERMINE THE READING DIFFICULTY LEVELS OF TEXTBOOKS AND RESOURCE MATERIALS.
77.1% (s.a.=30.2%, a.=46.9%)

17. SPONSOR A READING MATERIAL BANK AND EXCHANGE AMONG TEACHERS.
75.9% (s.a.=32.5%, a.=43.5%)

31. INITIATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROUP PROBLEM-SHARING SESSIONS.
66.5% (s.a.=21%, a=44.6%)

MINOR TEACHER CONSIDERATIONS
CF < 50%

NO ITEMS FELL IN THIS CLUSTER

The remaining five statements in this area were assigned to secondary functions relating to inservice training assistance provided by the reading consultant to the classroom teacher and appear in descending order in Table II. As throughout the study, item appointment to secondary functions was based on the investigators' arbitrarily assigned criteria of cumulative frequencies $\leq 84\% \geq 50\%$.

CONDUCTING WORKSHOPS AND HELPING TEACHERS COORDINATE READING MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS were cited as useful consultant functions by approximately 82% of the teachers, while HELPING TEACHERS DETERMINE READING DIFFICULTY LEVELS AND SPONSORING A READING MATERIAL BANK AND EXCHANGE AMONG TEACHERS were noted as facilitory consultant services by about 76% of the responders. Additionally, 66% thought the consultant should INITIATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROUP PROBLEM-SHARING SESSIONS.

None of the opinionnaire items relating to in-service functions of the reading specialist could be assigned to cluster three, minor teacher considerations.

Table III depicts teacher assessment of the consultant's administrative roles and responsibilities. A significant proportion of teachers agreeably responded to make the secondary functions cluster worthy of attention. Within this cluster, teachers showed a distinct preference in how they viewed the facilitory nature of a consultant's administrative duties, with the two highest statements having virtually the same percent of agreement (77%). These statements dealt with PROVIDING CONSULTING SERVICES TO PARENTS CONCERNING SPECIAL TESTING SERVICES and TEST INTERPRETATION and SERVING AS A RESOURCE PERSON TO

TEACHERS FOR TEACHING MATERIALS, COMMUNITY MEDICAL HELP, PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING, SPECIAL EDUCATION FACILITIES, COMMERCIAL AND NON-PROFIT TUTORIAL CENTERS. Both include consultant acitivity relative to testing; thus the almost identical agree percent was not surprising.

TABLE III
ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES
PRIME FUNCTIONS
cf $\geq$ 85%

NO ITEMS IN THIS AREA COULD BE ASSIGNED TO PRIME FUNCTIONS.

SECONDARY FUNCTIONS
cf $\leq$ 84% $\geq$ 50%

26. PROVIDING CONSULTING SERVICES TO PARENTS CONCERNING SPECIAL TESTING SERVICES AND TEST INTERPRETATATION.
77.1% (s.a.=36.2%, a.=40.8%)

28. SERVE AS A RESOURCE PERSON TO TEACHERS FOR TEACHING MATERIALS, COMMUNITY MEDICAL HELP, PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING, SPECIAL EDUCATION FACILITIES, COMMERCIAL AND NON-PROFIT TUTORIAL CENTERS.
76.6% (s.a.=36.2%, a.=40.5%)

15. ACQUAINT TEACHERS WITH UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS AND COURSES AVAILABLE FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.
66.7% (s.a.=27.6%, a.=39.1%)

32. COORDINATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SYSTEM-WIDE CURRICULUM GUIDE.
65.3% (s.a.=26%, a.=39.1%)

16. MAINTAIN AND CIRCULATE A PROFESSIONAL LIBRARY.
65.1% (s.a.=26.4%, a.=38.7%)

ADMINISTRATIVE DUTIES
MINOR TEACHER CONSIDERATIONS
cf $\leq$ 50%

34. PROPOSE A BUDGET FOR READING MATERIALS.
47.8% (s.a.=17.9%, a.=29.8%)

33. SELECT BASAL MATERIALS FOR READING TEACHERS TO USE.
37.2% (s.a.=10.3%, a.=26.9%)

The remaining three successively ranked opinionnaire statements listed under secondary functions of a consultant's administrative roles showed only a minor shift in teacher perfection of those activities as being helpful. In round numbers, two-thirds of the respondents agreed that ACQUAINTING TEACHERS WITH UNIVERSITY COURSES AND PROGRAM, COORDINATING DEVELOPMENT OF A SYSTEM-WIDE CURRICULUM GUIDE, and MAINTAINING AND CIRCULATING A PROFESSIONAL LIBRARY are appropriate administrative tasks for the consultant.

As mentioned earlier, we classified as minor teacher considerations items receiving less than 50% support (cf 50%). Under Administrative Duties two items fell in this category: PROPOSE A BUDGET FOR READING MATERIALS FOR READING TEACHERS TO USE and SELECT BASAL MATERIALS. We interpret this to mean that reading teachers do not want consultants to pick out basals for them to use, but we were perplexed with the less than 50% support for the consultant to propose a budget for reading materials. This task seems to us to be a crucial function and best performed by the reading consultant. Who else would perform the budgeting task better than the person overseeing the entire procedure? Our analysis is that the task was not understood fully by the participants responding to this instrument; therefore, we would suggest that consultants continue to consider budgeting an important task to be performed. It is noteworthy that one of the seven opinionnaire items, as rated by the 767 teacher participants, could be appointed to prime functions under administrative roles. Perhaps this is because the consultant's administrative functions are relatively unknown or their scope not yet fully perceived by colleagues. It may also represent, however, prejudices of those participating in the

survey which have their origins in historical definitions of the reading consultant. Coordinating and managerial duties have traditionally fallen outside the range of the content area, classroom specialist. However, as the shift of consultant activity proceeds away from classroom and direct student-oriented services and towards advisory, managerial and consultatory endeavors with colleagues, a new breed of administrator makes an entrance on the educational scene. We have the emergence of the specialty consultant.

THE BOTTOM LINE

In perspective an opinionnaire survey should be seen for what it is: a collective view, monentary in nature, which can give direction to the collector and those interested in the results. At this time it seems reasonable that reading consultants could profitably utilize this surveys' results in defining their roles and priorizing their functions.

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